

Slam Wail

By Clarice Hare

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

Here is an epic, enraged, engaging epistle. Take a sip from this stanza “I want to tear off the sarcoline / platform heels I always wear with these / tiny cocktail dresses, and stiletto slam / your skull. Knock your eyes off her!” I’m not sure which finishing school Ms. Hare attended, but it sounds like a dorm worth sneaking into. “milk that you’ve missed since / mommy shoved you off?” Believe me it gets better in its exquisite exasperations. Clarice sounds like a lamb not to be silenced, but who would dare try? She has declared herself “neurodivergent.” I too often feel similarly but it is admittedly self-diagnosed. She certainly exercises her spirit with a vibe most heatedly scribed. HS (Spacing is poet’s own.)

Slam Wail

“I am black! Black! I scream, my hair
drying into talons.”

I want to tear off the sarcoline
platform heels I always wear with these
tiny cocktail dresses, and stiletto slam
your skull. Knock your eyes off her!

Can you seriously sit there right
beside me and not feel how the
hotness rolls off me like hot

batter from a sizzling and
screeching dryer? Pouring down my
neck in incarnadine channels of

Clarice Hare

Slam Wail, page 2, continue stanza

milk that you've missed since
mommy shoved you off?

I know you're grown up to
full attention—the blue washes out, but you
have eyes like lapis lazuli. More precious
than pearls!—that you'd cast before
her, and not me?

When I can make for you cerulean days, or
a coquelicot butterfly southward go in the
water's wake; I can make your
midnight amaranthine!

Can I light your skeleton? Oh, just
consent!

I'll whisk you off to Thailand, Zen
juice to the face, hot bath of porphyry
frangipani overlooking Sagarmatha. We'll do L.A.,

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Slam Wail, page 3, continue stanza

we'll do Shanghai, we'll do Formentera,
we'll do Firenze, we'll do Paris. De la France

à l'île Maurice pour l'hiver, oui.

You'll do me and I'll do me on plages,

playas, spiagge, pantai, planes—

first class all the way.

I know my anthropologie, does she?

I'll shake you up like a soda can and

pour you like champagne.

I'll warn you, though, I'm not a

bottomless well of fulvous sunshine—I'm

a shiny rumble, a taut, crossfit

eburnean rock-tumble, blowing

you to hell and back and pummeling

when you stumble. I'll hit you

with the audio equivalent
of a full-blown self-published
novel.

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Slam Wail, page 4, begin new stanza

I am the green-eyed beast, I'm
Smaug, I'm smaragdine.

I'll spit your glaucous worm juice back
in your face till you beg for it like I'm
your mom.

I'll paint your portrait in caput mortuum,
spotlight your dick privileges in bastard-amber,
dress the ashes of your self-esteem in bias-cut
flame-of-burnt-brandy organza.

Your affinity for my feminist aphorism I'll twist and
twist harder until your face turns absinthe.

I shall bestow a lyrical baguette-
meet-head to your puddin' here—see if she's

all “Drink it, fuckin’ whites!”, or if she’d punch back.

I could forget I was white, out of sight, while I fight

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Slam Wail, page 5, continue stanza

her for the right to you—Wobble-Downward

Twister, sisters after misters, how to take

a mummy out of the jungle and paint

Clarice Hare

Slam Wail, page 3, continue stanza

the shades of my dark life with his

ground gout—ooohhh, I

could just—

Ow! Fuck these shoes! Hey,

wait up!

THE POET SPEAKS: *As a neurodivergent person whose wonky brain functions far better on a concrete, intuitive level than an abstract, analytical one, it is difficult for me to describe the genesis and gestation of my writings. In most cases, everything I wish to (or, quite often, can) communicate about my poetry is contained within the poem itself. I am also gravely cautioned by W.H. Auden’s statement (opening the forward to *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays*) that “[i]t is a sad fact about our culture that a poet can earn much more money writing or talking about his art than he can by practicing it.” And since these days I have a perfectly secure, if deadly*

dull white-collar job (which I'm sure would be quite far down any list most of my past acquaintances might make of fates likely to befall me), I anticipate few incentives to try and grab such money. (If that's even possible, because if the dude thought the writing business was hard in his day...)

My obligatory kicking over the traces done, I can say that "Slam Wail" was inspired by the many amateur coffee-house poetry slams I attended during my college years, and is a sort of amalgamation of multiple fuzzily remembered sociosexual interactions I observed at these events. The speaker is a young, upper-class white woman—probably a poet herself—who's gotten herself sexily but inappropriately up in a short cocktail dress and sky-high platform heels, and is now watching huffily as the guy she's set her sights on grows increasingly enamored of the black female poet currently on stage.

The first two lines are her scornful mental parody of this poet's proud, aggressive words (with a nasty stab at her hair thrown in); the rest is all her. With mounting desperation, she tries to convince the guy that she's hotter than the black woman reading (which she doubtless is, by mainstream American standards...but that's probably not what he's going by); that she'd be better in bed; that she can take him on fancy vacations she naturally assumes the other woman couldn't afford. Realizing that he actually seems to be attracted to the black woman's expression of strength and aggression, she tries to assert her own—rather ludicrously. She even lunges, briefly and desperately, into rap-like rhythms. In the last two lines, just as her pique threatens to demolish all her attempts at eloquence, she is forced to abandon them anyway, and scurry after her target in her impractical shoes as he goes, most likely, to compliment the poet on her reading, and invite her out for drinks afterward.

Throughout the poem, I had fun incorporating various obscure and archaic color words, as the speaker assumes it's her whiteness, with its concomitant associations of blandness, that's failing to interest the guy, rather than her personality. (My personal favorite is "flame-of-burnt-brandy"—I would totally buy a flame-of-burnt-brandy organza dress if I could find one!) "Slam Wail" as a whole is intended to poke fun at white artists (and white people in general) who resent the perceived incursion of POC into domains they see as theirs, and for taking things that they want (because the speaker, with questionable feminism, really does view a dick as a thing). The title, while indeed referring to an internal wail being let loose at a slam, is also a homophone of "slam whale", which is a derogatory term used for an overweight woman in certain corners of the internet; here, its use to title a torrent of female-on-female derision is a statement of how sexism and looksism—while arguably stemming from patriarchy—are not confined to men.

All of my poetry flows from an inborn love of language and of writing, which—though not encouraged by my family—remained a psychological lifeline to me from a difficult childhood, through many far more difficult episodes of adulthood, and into my current, relatively dull life. I have written in the best of times and the worst of times; in the latter, it has helped me quite literally to survive. "Slam Wail" in particular can be traced all the way back to two humorously vicious persona poems by Robert Browning, "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and "The Laboratory: Ancien Régime", which provided my revelation, as a first-generation college

freshman, that poetry could express more than prettiness, pleasantness, and piety—it could be a vehicle for personal venom more succinct and concentrated than fiction.

*While my subjects and images are the products of that wonky brain of mine and the experiences I have subjected it to, the language in which I struggle to express them aspires toward the irregular yet arresting rhythms of Marianne Moore and the subtle internal and slant rhymes of Sylvia Plath. Many of my poems come from the falling-apart notebooks and journals I've lugged with me on my life's journey like normal people lug clothes, furniture, spouses, and children: some lifted almost entire from the stained, fading pages, others substantially reworked. Still others, like "Slam Wail", were written more recently but drawn from past experiences. I'm only now taking my first timid stabs at publication, and am grateful to appear in *Fleas on the Dog*.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Clarice Hare prefers to remain a mystery, as anyone who knew her in previous phases of her life—before settling into comfortable obscurity in the southern United States with an assortment of furry and scaly pets and a single, occasional, though admittedly gorgeous younger lover—would understand.*